

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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OMB-01 TRSE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 EUR-12 FAA-00

DOT-00 EB-08 /071 W

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FM AMEMBASSY NASSAU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9173

C O N F I D E N T I A L NASSAU 0353

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, BF

SUBJ: PRESS LEAK ON FACILITIES OFFER

1. MARCH 12 TRIBUNE (PRO-OPPOSITION) CARRIED FRONT-PAGE STORY (TEXT BELOW) CLAIMING THAT GCOB "SITTING SILENTLY" ON USG OFFER OF 175 MILLION DOLLARS OVER 15 YEARS FOR MILITARY FACILITIES HERE AND THAT USG "ANNOYED" BY LACK OF RESPONSE TO ITS OFFER MADE IN "EARLY 1975." LATTER DATE IS ONLY GLARING INACCURACY IN ARTICLE WHICH ALSO CONTAINED "NO COMMENTS" BY AMBASSADOR AND BY MINEXTAFF (DEPPERMSEC GEORGE STEWART).

2. IN SEEKING COMMENT MARCH 12, ARTICLE'S AUTHOR, IVAN JOHNSON, TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT HE GOT STORY FROM "RELIABLE LOCAL SOURCE." SINCE TERMS OF USG OFFER KNOWN ONLY TO A HANDFULL OF GCOB OFFICIALS (E.G., MOST MINISTERS STILL IN DARK), THAT WOULD NARROW POSSIBLE SOURCE TO THAT HANDFULL OF BAHAMIANS AND, PERHAPS, BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION. ANTI-PLP TONE AND VENUE OF ARTICLE POINTS TO ONE OF THE FORMER WITH AN AXE TO GRIND AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT.

3. WE EXPECT FEW REPERCUSSIONS FROM ARTICLE, SINCE
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FACILITIES NEGOTIATIONS ARE A NON-ISSUE HERE. (MARCH 14 GUARDIAN, FOR EXAMPLE, SILENT ON THE SUBJECT.) WE INTEND TO MAINTAIN PUBLIC "NO COMMENT" AND, IF QUERIED BY MINEXTAFF, TO EXPRESS OUR SURPRISE AND INNOCENCE.

4. TEXT OF ARTICLE FOLLOWS:

"BAHAMAS SITS ON DOLS 175M. AUTECH OFFER - BY IVAN JOHNSON

"THE BAHAMAS GOVERNMENT IS SITTING SILENTLY ON AN OFFER MADE TWO YEARS AGO BY THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT TO LEASE THE US ANDROS NAVAL BASE (AUTECH) FOR DOLS 175 MILLION OVER A 15 YEAR PERIOD, THE TRIBUNE HAS BEEN RELIABLY INFORMED.

"UNDER THE AGREEMENT THE US GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE PAID ALMOST DOLS 12 MILLION YEARLY FOR EXCLUSIVE USE OF THE BASE. AMERICAN AMBASSADOR IN THE BAHAMAS, JACK B. OLSON, TODAY REFUSED TO COMMENT.

"BUT THE TRIBUNE HAS BEEN RELIABLY INFORMED THAT THE US IS ANNOYED BY THE BAHAMIAN GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO REPLY TO THE DOLS 175 MILLION OFFER MADE IN EARLY 1975.

"IT IS UNDERSTOOD GOVERNMENT INTENDS TO USE THE BASE NEGOTIATIONS AS A STRONG BARGAINING TOOL IN FUTURE FISHING LIMIT TALKS. THE US RECENTLY DECLARED A 200 MILE FISHING LIMIT OFF ITS COASTLINE.

"THE US GOVERNMENT'S OFFER OF DOLS 175 MILLION OVER 15 YEARS HAS NOT BEEN ANSWERED. IT WAS MADE TWO YEARS AGO. BUT THE US CAN'T GET ANY RESPONSE ON THE MATTER FROM THE BAHAMIAN GOVERNMENT,' A SOURCE SAID.

"THE SOURCE SAID THE US GOVERNMENT WANTS TO DEVELOP THE ANDROS BASE AND HIRE BAHAMIANS TO WORK AT THE NAVAL AND MILITARY INSTALLATION. 'BUT THIS CAN'T BE DONE UNLESS CONFIDENTIAL

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THE US GETS A LEASE,' EXPLAINED THE SOURCE.

" 'NEGOTIATING TALKS BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS WERE TO HAVE BEEN COMPLETED BY THE END OF 1975. BUT THE BAHAMIAN GOVERNMENT ASKED FOR AN EXTENSION INTO 1977. HOWEVER, NOTHING HAS HAPPENED SINCE THEN,' SAID THE SOURCE.

"SENATOR PAUL ADDERLEY, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER WAS NOT AVAILABLE FOR COMMENT AT HIS HIGHLAND PARK HOME TODAY. A MAID SAID HE WAS BUSY GARDENING.

"GEORGE STEWART, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPUTY PERMANENT SECRETARY, THE MINISTRY'S MAN RESPONSIBLE FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS REFUSED TO COMMENT.

"IN SEPTEMBER 1975 PRIME MINISTER PINDLING TOLD A MIAMI HERALD REPORTER ON THE MONTHLY RADIO PROGRAMME "CONTACT" THAT HIS GOVERNMENT HAD TOLD BRITAIN AND THE US THE BAHAMAS WANTED TO COMPLETE TALKS REGARDING US

OPERATION OF THE BASE BY THE END OF 1975.

"THE TALKS, WHICH BEGAN IN MAY 1973, INCLUDE THE AUTECH RESEARCH AND WEAPONS TESTING FACILITY ON ANDROS, A US NAVY BASE ON ELEUTHERA, AND A US AIR FORCE BASE AT GRAND BAHAMA.

"REPORTS IN 1975 INDICATED GOVERNMENT HAD PINNED A DOLS 25 MILLION ANNUAL PRICE TAG ON THE BASE. HOWEVER, AT THE TIME, PRIME MINISTER PINDLING DECLINED TO DENY OR CONFIRM THE FIGURE.

"IN JANUARY 1976 EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER PAUL ADDERLEY TOLD THE MIAMI HERALD THAT THERE WERE SOME DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE BAHAMIAN AND US GOVERNMENT OVER US INSTALLATION IN THE BAHAMAS.

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"MR. ADDERLEY SAID IT WAS POSSIBLE THE BAHAMAS WOULD ASK THE US TO GIVE UP ITS MILITARY INSTALLATIONS IN THE BAHAMAS IF A SATISFACTORY AGREEMENT COULDN'T BE REACHED.

"HE SAID EXCHANGES BUT NOT FORMAL DISCUSSIONS HAD BEEN HELD REGARDING THE BASES SINCE 1973. 'THE CRUX OF THE MATTER IS FINDING THE BASIS ON WHICH WE CAN AGREE ON A FINANCIAL OR ECONOMIC CONSIDERATION FOR THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF THE BASES,' HE TOLD THE MIAMI HERALD IN JANUARY 1976.

"ANDROS' AUTECH BASE IS THE MAIN US INSTALLATION IN THE BAHAMAS. IT IS USED TO TEST HIGHLY SOPHISTICATED UNDERWATER EQUIPMENT. WATERS NEAR THE BASE ARE THOUGHT TO BE AMONG THE DEEPEST IN THE WORLD."
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